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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

St. *Nicholas*, DEPTFORD,

ON THE

F A S T D A Y

Appointed by ROYAL PROCLAMATION,

On FEBRUARY 6, 1756.

By THOMAS ANGUISH, A. M.

VICAR of the said Church.

L O N D O N:

Printed for JOHN CLARKE, under the Royal Exchange.

MDCCLVI.

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tion; sitting upon occasions where human aid or help, human wealth or power are known to forsake us, or to fail in great distress of mind, and in outward affliction. It is the duty of the rich to relieve the poor, and the poor to relieve the rich. for forgetting too heavily for relief, we know of no other way of relief, which though placed far out of our usual path of life, is always ready to whom we are apprehensive of being pursued by the enemy.

LUKE xiii. 4, 5.

Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

RELIGION hath frequently received from the mouths of its adversaries a confession much to its honour; that it is of service to society: that whether true or not in its evidences, it is worthy of regard and protection from prudent men, as it tends to make those quiet and obedient to laws, who believe it. This is a civil sense of duty. But were we to commune calmly with our own hearts, and observe the corresponding practices of the world, we should find a natural and involuntary attestation to the truth and advantage of Reli-

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gion ; arising upon occasions where human art or help, human wealth or power are known to forsake us, or to fail. In great distress of mind, and in outward afflictions that deprive us of the aids of reason ; too sudden for foresight, too heavy for redress, we know of but one *city of refuge*, which though placed far out of our usual path of life, is always fled to when we are apprehensive of being pursued by the *divine avenger*.

This is most especially evident in the sinners' case, who in health and success has broke the bonds of religion asunder, and cast away all sacred obligations from him ; but whenever trembling, lest he should be made a sacrifice to justice, desires to be bound with cords, yea even to the horns of the altar. Nor is this change any effect of cowardice, but a return of that understanding he had banished ; the call of those faculties he had silenced ; an attention to that voice which could not be heard in the tumult of his passions. This even *Lucretius* confesses when he calls those suggestions of piety, which adversity occasions, true expressions drawn from the bottom of the heart. In conformity to such private and general dictates of the mind, we suppose Government to act when upon any public calamity or danger it appoints a time of more particular devotion ; and obliges all under its authority to sequester themselves from business or pleasure, and wait humbly upon their God.

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It would be equally the wisdom and the interest of mankind always to endeavour to deserve that protection, which they are sometimes so sensible they stand in need of; not to wait for those times of pressure, which may make their serious behaviour seem rather extorted than voluntary. This I fear, is rather to be wished than expected: however, let it be our present care to answer the intent of now assembling here; and consider, that no character of wickedness or folly can equal an action which attempts to elude infinite wisdom, mock infinite justice, or defy infinite power.

A few years ago there was an impression made upon us, from a shock of the same Element, through the more violent convulsions of which we are now alarmed. I remember there was then an evident sense of danger, and a general face of Religion: our churches were filled, and our conversations turned upon the probable judgments of God. How far a real reformation of manners went, they who reformed have the comfort of knowing. " We now deplore a city visited of the
 " Lord of hosts with thunder, and with Earthquake
 " and great noise; with storm and tempest and the
 " flame of devouring fire. The harvest of the Rivers
 " was her revenue, and she was the mart of nations. It
 " has pleased providence to make of this city a heap,
 " of this defended city a ruin. Gladness is taken away,
 " and joy out of the plentiful Field. In the city is left

“ desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction”. We are also at present hovering between peace and war, and are called upon by this uncertain posture of affairs to unite our addresses of humiliation, in imploring the divine favour to avert his judgments from us, that neither the power of our enemies, nor any other natural instrument of his displeasure may be our ruin.

In our reflections upon the desolations abroad the text gives a caution, not rashly to impute them to the greater guilt of the sufferers; and, applicable to both cases adds a positive assurance which regards our own conduct; “ except ye repent ye shall *all* likewise perish”.

Let us first consider the caution not rashly to impute the desolations of our neighbours to the greater guilt of the sufferers.

The case put by Christ happened under the *Jewish* œconomy, which was a sensible theocracy; a dispensation of temporal rewards and punishments, according to their works, and revealed to them as such: if there was an arrest of personal judgment then, no instance under the gospel can allow it.

I shall not take up your time with shewing how unfit we are to judge through our passions; nor how unbecoming such a province is to our ignorance; but shall reprove it as diverting our minds from a nearer, more
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important concern, and preventing our compassion. Curiosity is a most wandering, impatient disposition, an enemy to diligence and improvement, and has less care about our own business than many real vices, much higher in the catalogue of offence; it is restless and dissipates our thoughts, and provides such a variety of business abroad, that they never long for returning home; this it does when only as innocent as impertinence can be; only a simple desire of being acquainted with other men's matters, to fill the chasms of understanding and discourse: far is it from being always thus inoffensive.

When the rise of this inclination is from envy, malice, or mistaken zeal, it is ever more apt to rejoice in iniquity than in the truth; to hope all things and believe all things to the disgrace and injury of its object; when through any unchristian spirit we allow ourselves to credit unwarranted suspicion, and draw our consequences from the creatures of a cruel imagination, we abhor at the same moment, and upon the same motives we accuse. Justice is inseparable from our idea of God: could persecution for the cause of religion ever be vindicated, it must be upon this principle, (and to this principle it pretends) "God hath forsaken him, persecute him and take him, for there is none to deliver him." Thus our Saviour foretells the case of his disciples; "He that killeth you will think that he doth God service." The command of the gospel, *Judge not*, would there-

therefore go a great way towards promoting compassion and benevolence.

Our distressed neighbours have indeed a religion and government of this intolerant kind, and their prodigious misfortune happened on the day of their Inquisition, when the Fury of persecution is let loose, and woe to those which it seizes. This world and all its comforts are no more; death with the most aggravated cruelty is inflicted, and to the next world with its endless tortures are the mangled wretches consigned. This might awaken thoughts too apt to divert us from their national sufferings, and, if cherished, lead us to indifference or complacency.

God be praised, this was not the sense of our superiors; I saw when, to the eternal honour of our most gracious Sovereign, and the grand council of these nations assembled in Parliament, a certain intelligence of the terrible catastrophe at *Lisbon* was no sooner communicated than bewailed. No sooner was there, by the ROYAL LETTER, a speedy, generous, and effectual relief recommended, but granted with an unison of mind and voice, without hesitation, without delay!

In such high distress it is becoming to weep for them, and pour out the tears of yielding humanity; better than with a barbarous and ignorant censure pass judgment upon their deserts, and presume to account for
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their sufferings as the assessors of providence; let us rather weep for ourselves, and shed the availing tears of repentance: let us remember and regard the positive assurance in the text, and apply it to our own conduct; "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Earthquakes have at all times affected mankind with more serious terror than appearances in the Heavens; perhaps arising from a tradition that the dissolution of the world will be by subterraneous fire; or from the more steady dependance we have been used to fix up on this element for the comforts and conveniences of being. *Asia* was in former times the chief scene of these calamities. The first that history takes notice of were at *Sparta*; and in *Greece*, at the time of the *Peloponnesian* war, a little after the plague at *Athens*, when the surprize they occasioned delayed the progress of that war. They were afterwards more frequent, extensive, and ruinous.

I shall only mention the influence of one, as it regards this solemn occasion, and may be a lesson to us. In the year of our Lord three hundred forty eight, the city of *Berytus* was in great part overturned by an earthquake: the inhabitants were so terrified, that they who had not embraced the christian religion crowded to the churches to be baptized. To which, history adds a melancholy reflection: the lives of such sudden converts, uninstructed in,

in the *principles* of christianity, did no honour to the religion they fled to for *sanctuary* in distress.

It is observable that among the instances of God's displeasure for sin, in *Solomon's* prayer at the dedication of the temple, publick famine, pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, caterpillar, war, captivity. — Earthquakes are not mentioned; and when the prophet *Ezekiel* threatens the *Jews* with four sore divine judgments, they are the sword, the famine, the noisome beast, and the pestilence, by none of which the buildings of the city or the temple could be *affected*. Nor do we read of any earthquake in *Judea* till about thirty years before Christ; and after that in *Jerusalem* at his crucifixion, when the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, as if the God of *Israel* began to shew a new act of wrath for so high an impiety; which was in the end to prove the ruin of their temple, city, and government for ever.

The true uniform causes of these disorders are probably a secret, though the effects are evident. Gnefles may be ingenious, and harmless as they are not sure, but there do not seem to be sufficient data for these discoveries. Such knowledge is not only too wonderful and excellent for us, but concealed from us for our good: if we could tell how unfaithful ground we trod on without a power of defence or escape, the blessings
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of life would have a great alloy, be embittered with fear, distrust, and danger.

War is a calamity of man's own making, the creature of lawless appetite, a lust of territory and dominion in violation of right and faith: a perversion of power, and when not permitted as a judgment, an insult upon providence: it is a greater misery than what we just now mentioned. And when I only consider our span of being here, I pronounce it more eligible to have the earth open her mouth and take us alive into the pit, than to endure the more base and lingering evils of rapine and slavery from a poor, merciless, insulting *Gaul*.

We assemble here threatened at present with both these judgments, such I venture to call them now; and appeal to our own consciences for the charity of this expression, as I do to the text for the method of averting them: "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

Should it be enquired, of what are we to repent? the question may be privately answered by every sincere heart, which chooses to know its own bitterness.

The design of these public exhortations may demand some general topics of reflexion; and usefully treat of the prevailing errors to which immorality and impiety are chiefly owing. These are mistakes about human

nature and human liberty: a counsel which we early hear, and which we are at all times ready to attend to, is to follow nature. Follow nature and take care of the end is a precept of right reason and prudence, but as it is maimed and applied a very false maxim.

Be it observed then that the nature of man, the proper distinguished nature of man, is a being endued with reason, and capable of immortality: to follow the laws of this nature is to be a creature of thought and discretion; to act with caution in all matters of moment, and to be afraid of error; to disdain all present proffers inconsistent with future peace and expectations: to reflect always that he is allied to a nature of inferior appetites, which are common to him and those who have only animal life: these it is his honour to have as few attachments to as possible, because it is sinking from his proper dignity, and debasing that nature which he has only in common with the angels. If then they who bid men follow nature, mean only that nature which is animal, which consists in meats and drinks, and carnal ordinances, they mistake the thing, and bid a *man* act unnaturally, bid a rational creature not follow his reason; an immortal being not provide for immortality, till to him who alone was formed erect and upright, who alone was made in the image of God, this friend pronounces the serpent's curse, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. Thus vice subsists by falshood, To follow
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low the nature I have truly described is our duty, and by that we shall be led to honour and happiness, we shall imitate as far as we can the divine nature, who will here guide us with his counsel, and afterwards receive us with glory.

Thus too we are desired to beware of religious and civil slavery by those who have an equal affection for government and religion. I know no other religion but true christianity; and its master's character of that is just, "My yoke is easy, and my burthen is light": and the apostle ought to be believed when he says his servants ye are to whom ye obey, be our tyrant the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life.

In civil affairs also they may be servants of corruption who talk to others so loudly of liberty. It is not only the hand, but the head and the heart that should be untainted. Pride, vanity, envy, revenge, disappointment, whatever obliges us to act by undue influence robs us of our integrity: nor can we indulge any vicious affection, which may not prove a wild, cruel, insatiate corruption.

Alas human nature! what do not only want avarice and animal desires, but the thirsts of power and honour, the most reputable passions debase and enslave us? Indeed they do: who then is free? he who is wisely dispassionate and independent of public vice or folly, who

seeks for happiness in the wisdom and integrity of his own mind, where alone it is to be found ; in subdued appetites, in duty to his God, and to his neighbour ; and in a lively hope of those perfect and eternal joys which were brought to light, purchased, and promised by the gospel.

From such taints and delusions in matters of this moment, the understanding is darkened and alienated from the christian life. These moral errors give a man no time, and take away all desire for religious information ; which is represented as useless, or inconvenient, or troublesome. And this is the real fact to them : the principles of our bounden duty are stubborn, active and interesting : if they are heard they will make *Felix* tremble, and are therefore dismissed to that convenient season, which seldom or never comes.

From these prepossessions we must be retrieved, or ruined. We ought to have more pride and ingenuity than to be contented with the character of brutes, to be referred to their Husks for the most delicate entertainment, and to their end for the noblest hope. Is it not extremely an infatuation in us to believe against our own feelings and experience that there can be a vicious freedom unless to be undone ? All present objects of deserved misery in every station owe their loss of property, esteem and comfort to luxury, to sloth, to dishonesty, that is, to guilt.

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From the beginning it was thus: *Adam's* paradise of ease and plenty was changed for briars and thorns, labour and sorrow by his transgression. Moral evil was the original of natural; which will ever be its companion. Not only sacred but profane history is filled with these reports, and one moral may be drawn from the fabulous and the true. No empire, no kingdom, no commonwealth, no society, no family, no single person was ever long wicked and happy.

Let us then repent of this abuse of reason and time, this being lost to truth and to virtue. God Almighty has done all to reclaim us that is consistent with our freedom of will; has given all advantages we ought to wish for to the side of his commandments, and an abundant evidence to his revelations; it is of solid concern to us whether we are to be happy or wretched for ever. This, if any thing, must strike us: for an eternity, though despised or disbelieved, will not cease to be real.

Shall we degrade the noble faculties of our soul, treat them as unworthy our regard, refuse them audience and authority, till their reproaches be perpetual and severe, an earnest of eternal wrath? Will we persist in defying a judgment to come till we appear before it? Will we stay for conviction of our bondage to sin, till we are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness?

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Unless we repent of such principles and practices, we shall all likewise perish, and worse than the *likewise* in the text: an earthquake or a war may kill the body, and that is all they can do; but such a want of faith and goodness under so clear a light, will destroy both body and soul in hell.

Then what will abstruse reasonings, polite taste, pleasant ridicule; what a qualified, refined, temporizing religion avail us? The ready arts of business, and the balances of deceit will then be found wanting. It will cost more to redeem their souls, so that they must let that alone for ever. By reason, by conscience, by the word of God we shall be tried; by our attention and obedience to them justified; by our contempt and violation of them condemned.

But let me return to our present case, though how soon the other may be present God only knows. If our natural or political foundations are, in the counsels of the most high, next to be cast down, what have the most righteous among us done to save ourselves, or our-----?

Sodom would have been reprieved through the intercession of one faithful, if ten righteous men could have been found in it. So gracious was God's goodness! So total their depravity! such a glory in shame! such an insolence of prostitution!

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Let then the warnings of providence which we this day meet to acknowledge, and our own demerits which we solemnly and with contrite hearts confess, raise in us vows of holy obedience in thought, word, and deed to the divine majesty. Let us beware of such insinuations to the prejudice of piety and virtue, as will tend to weaken our good opinion of them: and so inform ourselves of the principles of the doctrine of Christ, that we may be ready to give an answer to those who ask us a reason of the hope that is in us. By this knowledge, and a suitable conversation, we shall be able to stand in the evil day, and prove the truth of our Lord's comparison: "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doth them, is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the rains descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock."

I shall conclude with a most awful threat of omnipotence.

"Because I have *called*, and ye refused: I have
 " *stretched out my hand* and no man regarded: but ye
 " have set at nought all my council and would none of
 " my *reproof*; I also will laugh at your calamity, I will
 " mock when your fear cometh; when your fear
 " cometh as *desolation*, and your destruction as a
 " *whirl*."

“ *whirlwind*, when distress and anguish cometh upon
 “ you: then shall they call upon me but I will not
 “ answer; they shall seek me early but they shall not
 “ find me. For that they *bated* knowledge, and did
 “ not *chuse* the fear of the Lord.

“ I will come near unto you in judgment, and I will
 “ be a swift witness against the forcerers, and against the
 “ adulterers, and against false swearers; and against
 “ those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow
 “ and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger
 “ from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of
 “ hosts.”

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 “ whirlwind.”